

Regulations for the funding program «Young talents in clinical research»

1. Preamble

These days, medical doctors engaged in clinical research are faced with a wide range of challenges. These are a lack of time, particularly during medical training, and the scarcity of funding available to conduct clinical research projects. Whether young researchers receive specialist and academic support will often depend on how committed and well qualified their supervisor is, i.e. there is currently no system-inherent support. The tools for clinical research, i.e. the basic theoretical and practical skills that need to be acquired, are largely a matter for young researchers themselves. Furthermore, they have to accept a lower salary because being involved in research is still not paid nearly as well as working in a hospital.

If one observes the careers of doctors involved in clinical research, it becomes clear that the qualification phase – i.e. the phase when the tools for research must be acquired (when the first independent clinical research work is conducted and the first papers are published) – actually coincides with a period when medical training is still ongoing and assistant doctors already have plenty to do.

In light of this, it is becoming increasingly difficult to motivate young medical doctors to pursue an academic career. Starting out is especially difficult because young doctors have no real experience in research. They are on a par with PhD students in this respect, who only receive a very low salary.

The Gottfried und Julia Bangerter-Rhyner Stiftung (hereinafter the «Bangerter Foundation») and the Swiss Academy of Medical Sciences (SAMS) want to contribute to more assistant doctors venturing into a career in clinical research through this funding program.

The Bangerter Foundation and the SAMS signed an agreement on 21 March 2017 relating to the implementation of the funding program. The agreement was renewed on 14 January 2021. These regulations form an integral part of the renewed agreement.

2. Aims

The Bangerter Foundation and the SAMS have launched together the «Young talents in clinical research» funding program. The aim of this initiative, which will be restricted to 2017-2024, is to

- encourage young medical doctors to start out in clinical research
- improve the quality of clinical research so that Switzerland maintains and strengthens a leading position in research and innovation.

Clinical research is defined here as research involving humans (patients and healthy people) as well as research on the causes and consequences of disease involving material of human origin and health-related personal data that aim to improve the prevention, diagnosis, cure and care of diseases. Clinical research includes quality-controlled scientific investigations on human physiology, pathophysiology or disease; epidemiologic and behavioral studies; outcomes or health services research; studies on the development of new technologies and clinical trials.

The Bangerter Foundation is making CHF 1 million available each year for the period from 2017 to 2024 for this purpose. The research supported must take place in Switzerland.

3. Funding instruments, participation requirements and evaluation criteria

To fulfil the aims of the funding program, the following instruments are used:

A. YTCR beginner grant

- For financing «protected time» with regard to training as a researcher;
- Generally, a maximum of CHF 75,000 per person, spread over one to a maximum of two years.

B. YTCR Project grant

- For realizing their own research project after the beginner grant (A) runs out;
- Generally, a maximum of CHF 40,000 per project per year, for a maximum of two years.

Assistant doctors working in Switzerland, who passed the medical state examination (Staatsexamen or equivalent degree) no more than five years before the submission deadline, and who have not been involved in clinical research except during their undergraduate medical studies and/or MD thesis, may submit an application for a YTCR beginner grant. Applicants enrolled in a PhD/MD-PhD in clinical research are not eligible for support through the YTCR funding program.

Grantees who have already been supported with a YTCR beginner grant and who passed the state examination no more than eight years ago may submit an application for a consecutive, YTCR project grant to consolidate the acquired research skills.

Exceptions to the eligibility window are possible in justified cases, provided that applicants still correspond to the main target group of the YTCR program.

Applicants cannot apply for a beginner grant and for a project grant at the same time.

The amount of time reserved for research for the duration of the grant must be specified in the application. The time freed up from clinical activities must be guaranteed by the department responsible in a binding letter to be enclosed with the application. In addition, an experienced mentor must guarantee to support the grantee during the grant period and beyond for her/his next career step.

When evaluating applications, the expert committee uses the following criteria:

- The applicant's motivation (including career plan);
- The applicant's potential for a career in clinical research;
- The mentor's academic qualifications and experience;
- The academic quality, topicality and feasibility of the planned study;
- The quality of the research group and institution where the research training is to take place or the research project is to be completed;
- The extent of support from the mentor, research group and institution, documented in a substantial supporting letter, with reference to any additional funding being provided for the project and to any support beyond the grant period for the applicant's next career step.

4. Submission procedure

The «Young talents in clinical research» funding program is being advertised through the information channels of SAMS (Bulletin, website, newsletter) and the Bangerter Foundation (website). Calls for proposals can also appear in the following publications: Schweizerische Ärztezeitung, Swiss Medical Weekly and Revue Médicale Suisse.

Detailed information about the funding program is published on the SAMS website under sams.ch/en/ytcr. Applications are to be submitted via the website using the form provided together with all the specified documents.

The submission deadlines will be announced well in advance, generally three months before the closing date. The first submission deadline was 30 June 2017.

5. Organisation of the funding program

The SAMS General Secretariat is responsible for the administrative and scientific management of the program. This is where applications are checked for formal eligibility and completeness, documents are prepared for the attention of the SAMS YTCR Expert Committee and evaluation meetings are organised. The SAMS is also responsible for answering content-related questions from candidates and for publicising the «Young talents in clinical research» funding program.

Applications are reviewed by the SAMS YTCR Expert Committee comprised of representatives from different disciplines. In accordance with the SAMS statutes, committee members are chosen by the SAMS Executive Board; the committee's chairperson is chosen by the SAMS Senate. The Bangerter Foundation is represented on the committee but has no voting powers. The Expert Committee decides which of the applications submitted will be proposed to the Bangerter Foundation Board for funding.

The Bangerter Foundation Board is responsible for approving funding. It decides which of the applications proposed for funding will receive support. Candidates are notified, whenever possible, within five months of the submission date.

6. Payment

Funding is either paid as a lump sum or in annual instalments by the Bangerter Foundation. Funding cannot be awarded retrospectively.

7. Conditions after approval

Grant recipients must write an annual interim scientific report (this is a condition for payment of any further instalments) and, once the grant has finished, they must write both a final scientific report and a final financial report. All relevant documents and receipts should be kept for the final financial report and submitted on request. Unused money must be repaid and must not be used for other purposes. The final scientific and financial reports must be submitted no later than six weeks after the funding period ends.

Significant changes in the research work or research conditions must be notified immediately to the SAMS. Such changes from what has been approved by the YTCR Expert Committee require

explicit approval by the SAMS. In the event of premature termination of the grant, the remaining amount must be returned pro rata temporis to the Bangerter Foundation.

Grant recipients are expected to make reference to the support received from the Bangerter Foundation and the SAMS, either in writing or using the SAMS logo, in all publications, posters, presentations, etc.

8. Changes to regulations

These regulations may be changed or adapted at any time by the Bangerter Foundation and the SAMS by mutual agreement. In the event of a discrepancy between the German version of these Regulations and a translation, the German version, if available, shall prevail.

Approved by the SAMS Executive Board in Bern on 22 February 2017 and by the Bangerter Foundation Board on 9 March 2017; adapted and approved by the SAMS Executive Board on 26 February 2019 and by the Bangerter Foundation Board on 29 March 2019.

Adapted and approved for the new funding period 2021-2024 on 8 September 2020 by the SAMS Executive Board and on 11 November 2020 by the Bangerter Foundation Board.